

MINUTES
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Commission Conference Call Meeting
1420 East 6th Avenue – Helena Headquarters
Helena, MT 59620

MARCH 27, 2008

Commission Member Present: Vic Workman; Dan Vermillion; Willie Doll.

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present: Larry Peterman; Joe Maurier, Diane Tipton; Becky Jakes-Dockter; Regena Peterson.

Topics of Discussion:

- 1. Opening – Call to Order**
- 2. Smith River Closure to Floating - Final**

1. Call to Order. In the absence of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, Larry Peterman, FWP Chief of Field Operations, called the Commission conference call to order at 3:00 p.m.

2. Smith River Closure to Floating – Final. Peterman stated that FWP is asking the Commission for authority to close the Smith River to floating from Camp Baker to Eden Bridge until it is ice-free and deemed safe for floaters. People are starting to float the Smith River already this spring, and a party became stranded downstream due to ice jams. The water at the Camp Baker access site is open, however a few miles downstream the ice has not yet dispersed. With permitted floating on the Smith River beginning April 1, FWP is concerned about safety issues that could result if floaters encounter ice blockages. Steep banks make it difficult to get out of the River.

Signs will be posted, the website will have closure information, and news releases will be published to announce the closure. The Department will personally contact permittees to inform them of the closure. FWP will fly the entire reach to ensure the river is ice-free before opening it up to floating. FWP is requesting approval from the Commission for a temporary rule authorizing the Department to close the Smith River as well as to re-open it when it is deemed to be safe from ice hazards.

Action: Doll moved and Workman seconded the motion to approve the closure of the Smith River, and to authorize the Department to reopen the river when it is deemed safe from ice hazards.

Vermillion asked if the river is normally open by April 1. Peterman said it is difficult to predict. In years past, it was not good for floating, however with the warming trends it has become more suitable. This spring it has been cold. Maurier said the late heavy snowstorm in that area has contributed to the problem.

A discussion followed regarding whether or not Camp Baker should be closed. It was ultimately decided to leave it open to fishing, but to close the boat ramp. It was also decided to close the river to floating, but to leave it open to bank fishing.

Action on Motion: Vermillion proposed to amend the motion to only close the river to floating, and not to wade or bank fishing.

Action on Motion: Doll and Workman accepted the amendment to the motion.

Action on Motion: Motion carried.

Joe Maurier, FWP Parks Division Administrator, said current policy does not provide for refunds, however since the Department is responsible for the closure, FWP should perhaps try to accommodate the permittees with an alternate float date or issue them a refund if acceptable to the Commission.

Vermillion stated that hunters and fisherman are not refunded when affected by safety closures due to fires and weather conditions. He suggested offering float permittees a “rain check” for a launch date, perhaps in July when the permits are not so coveted, or a permit for the next year. He does not feel a refund is warranted.

Maurier noted that the float is a limited opportunity where hunting often provides multiple opportunities.

Vermillion and Workman stated that this is weather related, and there is an assumption of risk when applying for a permit to float in the early spring in Montana.

Workman favored a “rain check” and no refund.

Doll agreed with offering a “rain check”. Folks applying for permits to float in the early spring should anticipate the possibility of undesirable weather conditions.

The conference call meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

Vic Workman, Acting Chairman

Larry Peterman, Chief of Field Operations